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ABSTRACT

One in a series of booklets for Hispanic American parents on making the most of a child's education, this volume provides specific information through which parents can assist their children to academically prepare for college, choose the right college, and apply to college. Chapter 1 introduces the planning process, emphasizing that it is never too late to begin to plan for higher education. Chapter 2 outlines the steps to take in the ninth grade, including selecting courses, finding extra assistance, attending after-school activities, and managing work. Chapter 3 covers the 10th grade and recommends courses for students to take, preparing for college admissions tests, and college fairs. Chapter 4 covers the 11th grade and touches on courses for this year, testing, and choosing what type of college to attend. Chapter 5 addresses issues for the 12th grade, including courses to take, testing, college application, how many colleges to apply to, types of information asked for on applications, and making a selection if the student is accepted at more than one institution. Each chapter closes with discussion questions. Contains six references. (JB)

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Making the Most of Your Child's Education Volume III: WHAT ABOUT COLLEGE?

Book II: Planning for College

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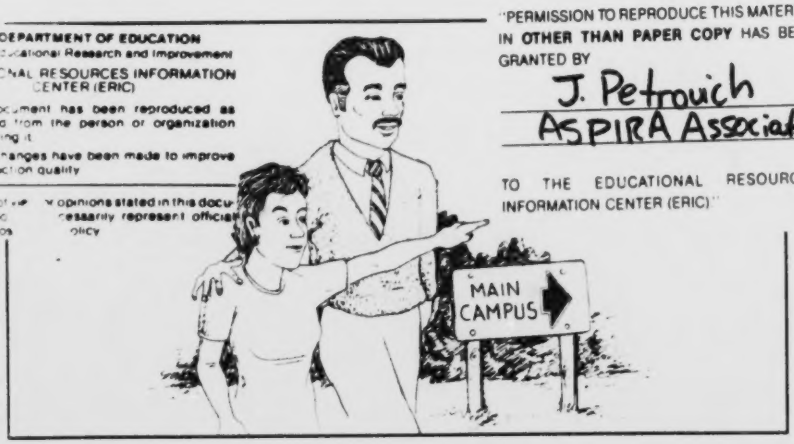

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Prepared for the ASPIRA Hispanic Opportunities through Parent Educational Support (High HOPES) Project

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The Hispanic Opportunities through Parent Educational Support (High HOPES) Project is funded by the Philip Morris Companies.

Making the Most of Your Child's Education Volume III:
WHAT ABOUT COLLEGE?

Book II: Planning for College

Prepared for the ASPIRA Hispanic Opportunities through Parent Educational Support (High HOPES) Project

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Forward

ASPIRA knows the power of a group of parents who have confidence in their own ability to create change. ASPIRA has helped develop that ability in Latino youth and families for over three decades.

Under the **Community Mobilization for Educational Excellence (COMEX)** initiative, ASPIRA began a full compliment of programs which forged stronger relationships between Latino families, their communities, and local educators. COMEX programs include **Teachers, Organizations, and Parents for Students (TOPS), Hispanic Opportunities through Parent Educational Support (High HOPES)** and **ASPIRA Parents for Educational Excellence (APEX).**

The **High HOPES** project provides the opportunity to introduce a third volume in ASPIRA's series of parent guides called, *Making the Most of Your Child's Education.* This newest volume gives advice and guidance to parents in promoting and planning for their children's access to higher education.

For further information on the High HOPES project contact:

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About These Guides

Through ASPIRA's programs, we have published these guides to help parents get involved in and improve their children's education. Volume I, *Making the Most of Your Child's Education: A Guide for Parents*, was created to offer practical advice to Latino parents on how to help their children's educational and developmental success in elementary through high school years. Volume II in the series, *Making the Most of Your Child's Education: More Topics for Parents*, gives more ideas on what parents can do to make schools in their community better.

The High HOPES project provided the opportunity to develop a third volume in the series, *Making the Most of Your Child's Education: What About College?*, based on the same approach used in these other highly successful parent involvement materials. This latest three-part publication gives parents good advice on what you can do for your child's college career.

The *Making the Most of Your Child's Education Volume III: What About College?* series consists of three books:

Book I - Preparing for College - Encourages you to think about college and decide whether college is a good option for your child.

Book II - Planning for College - Provides specific information through which you can assist your child to:

(a) academically prepare for college;
(b) choose the "right" college;
(c) apply to college.

Book III - Paying for College - Helps calm one of the biggest fears about college -- how to pay for it -- by providing various ways in which you and your child can apply for and obtain financial assistance.

Our goal is to give you practical advice and information to face the educational challenges confronting your children. These booklets will help you begin taking the necessary steps so that some day you can proudly watch your child receive a college degree and begin a bright and successful future.

Acknowledgements

ASPIRA would like to extend its gratitude to Fredericka Cuenca, Northeast Field Director, Midwest/Northeast Voter Registration and Education Project, and formerly Senior Policy Analyst, National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, for taking time out of her busy schedule to serve as an outside reviewer for this guide.

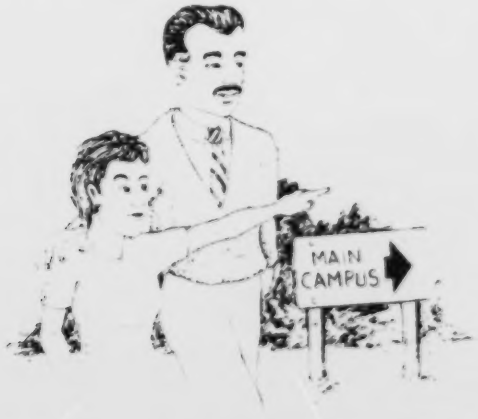
Introduction

Congratulations! You almost certainly can be the proud parent of a college student!

"Who, me?" you may ask. "But my daughter just gets average grades. My son doesn't know what he wants to do. My family isn't rich--we could never afford college. No one has ever gone to college in our family."

All the same, you can be the proud parent of a college student.

Just the fact that you are reading this booklet shows that you are interested. Remember: Without planning, almost no one can go to college. But with planning, anybody can.



To keep things simple, we say "parent" in these books, but we mean all of you who are the guardians of our children.

To make these books more personal, we alternate talking about "him" and "her" in our chapters instead of "them".

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Chapter One: When Should My Child and I Begin Planning for College?

Every Thursday, Mrs. Godoy stops by her daughter's house for coffee and a chat. Mercedes' oldest has just started kindergarten this week, and she smiles as she describes his excitement to her mother.

"Virgilio and I met his teacher last night and talked to her about our college hopes for Victor," she adds.

"College?" Mrs. Godoy is surprised. "But mi'ijita, isn't it too early to even think about college?"

When should you begin planning? **Now!**

Remember that with planning, anyone can go to college. **It is never too early to begin thinking about your child's future.** Of course, the closer your child is to his graduation from high school, the more time you and he should put into planning.

You may have already been doing several things for years to help your child prepare for college. For example, you've tried to make sure he gets a good education by talking positively about learning, reading with your child, help your child do homework, knowing your child's teachers, making sure your child attends school every day, and insisting that the school provide your child with a quality education.

Chapter One

In helping your child do well in school, the four years of high school are particularly important. Your child should work hard in high school, doing the best that he possibly can. But colleges are as interested in what a child studies as in how well he did in his classes.

Sometimes parents think that college is just for the smartest students. But in wealthy schools, often nearly all the students go on to college. Did they all get A's in high school? Don't believe it! Just like in life, most of the young people in most of the colleges are "average" students who got A's, B's, and C's in high school. The important thing is that they wanted to go to college and they prepared in advance. If your child wants to go to college and prepares in advance, he too can go to college.

This book will help you and your child prepare for college during the time your child is in the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grades. After reading it, we hope that you and your child will be able to:

1) prepare for college,

2) choose the college that is right for your child, and

3) apply to college.

Discussion Questions

Ask the group members:

1. Why are the high school years particularly important to help your child prepare for college?

2. Why do you think colleges are as interested in what a child studies as in a child's grades?

Chapter Two: The Ninth Grade

> *"So, Don Ernesto, your Mariela must be starting high school this year, no?"*
>
> *"That's right, she's in ninth grade and as bright as they come."*
>
> *"Have you started planning for college for her?"*
>
> *"Now? She's still a baby! There's plenty of time to think about college. And to tell you the truth, Sofía and I don't really know what we should be doing to plan, anyway."*

You have supported your child's education in many ways throughout her school years. By the time your child is in ninth grade the two of you should start taking concrete steps toward college. These steps include monitoring her school courses, finding support services for her, and encouraging her to participate in activities outside of school.

What courses should my child take in the ninth grade?

It is important that your child takes the courses that will help her be ready for college.

The most important document your child will have when she applies to colleges will be her high school transcript.

A "transcript" is a list that the school keeps of all the courses your child took and the grades that she got in them. Does she have to get all A's on her transcript to go to college? **No!**

Your child needs to choose her high school courses carefully to make sure that she takes classes that will prepare her academically for college. As her parent you need to watch carefully to make sure that she takes "college preparatory classes."

College preparatory classes are courses that prepare students for college work. Many colleges require that students take these courses in high school in order to be admitted to college.

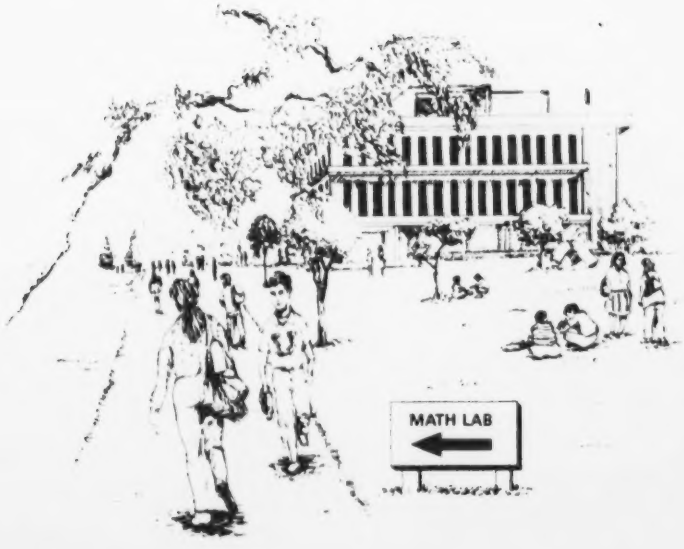
You can't automatically assume that the school is helping your child make the best choices. Sometimes school teachers and counselors persuade Latino children <u>not</u> to take the difficult courses they need for college. They may think that our children won't go to college, or wouldn't make it if they tried. They may think they're helping the child by pointing her to easier classes where she's sure not to fail, or to "more practical" classes to prepare her for non-college work.

If you want your child to have the choice to go to college, make sure she takes the right classes. How? There are two things you and your child can do.

Two things you can do to make sure your 9th-grader takes college-preparation classes:

1. **Visit the school counselor early in the year.**
   Each child in a school is assigned to a school counselor. This person's job is to help your child--make sure they know each other! You and your child can make an appointment to visit the school counselor. Tell the counselor that your child wants to go to college. Ask the counselor, "What classes should my child take to prepare her for college?" Write these down. Ask the counselor to work with your child to help her get ready. Make sure your child knows she can talk to her counselor whenever she has a problem or question.

2. **Compare the classes your child signs up for with the list of college-preparation classes.**
   Your child's school schedule in ninth grade should include the following classes: **Math** (especially **Algebra**), **English**, **Science**, and **Social Science** (sometimes called Social Studies). Especially in Math and English there may be several choices. Remember to encourage your child to take the more difficult classes (like Algebra instead of General Math), because these are the classes that will prepare her for college. If she has the opportunity, encourage your child to take **Honor's Courses**--challenging classes for students who will be going to college.



What kinds of services are available to help my child with her classes and other college preparation?

Ninth grade is also a good time to find out if there are any services in the community to help your child.

- **Community organizations** like ASPIRA provide children with bilingual counselors, help with homework, help with college plans, and new experiences to build their confidence and pride in who they are. Check to see if there is an ASPIRA office or other community organization in your area. You can also find a list of places at the end of *What About College Book I: Preparing for College*.

- **Mentoring programs** provide your child with a role model (a "mentor") to guide her to what she needs to do to be successful.

- **Tutoring programs** provide volunteers to help her with her homework.

People and places where you can ask for information about these services are:

- the school counselor,
- your local church,
- other community agencies,
- your friends (they may know about any programs in your city that help Latino children do well in school and get ready for college).

How will after-school activities help my child get into college?

Your child can improve her chances of being chosen by a good college by joining a club or some other after-school activity, or participating in community or church-based activities.

Joining a club, a sports team, or a performing group like the choir may seem like a waste of time to you, particularly if you count on your child to help the family at home or in a part-time job. However, there are several reasons why it is important:

- Studies show that children who participate in activities like these are more likely to stay in school.

- Colleges like to see students with several years of experience in some activity. It shows them that the student has interests besides school work and carries out these interests with other students.

- Activities can be fun and challenging for your child, letting her develop new interests and make new friends who are involved in school and share her interests. Making friends with other students who get good grades and want to go to college is another important way your child can prepare for college while she is in ninth grade.

What if my child has to work?

If your family's resources mean that your child has to work then you can help her to see that this is an activity that colleges are interested in, too. Working can mean that she has a paid job, but it also can mean taking care of her brothers and sisters or helping out in the family business. When she later applies to colleges she should be sure to tell them about these "extra activities" as well.

Discussion Questions

Ask the group:

1. Why is it important to start academically preparing for college no later than the ninth grade?

2. What advice would you give your child if she did not want to take college preparatory classes because they were "too hard"?

Chapter Three: The Tenth Grade

Mr. Collazo is concerned. His new stepson Eric has just transferred to the local high school. To Mr. Collazo, it doesn't seem like Eric had much guidance from the school counselors in choosing his classes. He's not sure, but he thinks the classes sound too easy to be good for Eric. Mr. Collazo hasn't had a chance to get to know Eric well yet, but he knows that he and Eric's mother both hope her son will go to college. He decides he should step in and help--as soon as he figures out what he advice he should be giving.

What courses should my child take in the tenth grade?

When your child is in tenth grade, you should make sure his classes include **Math** (especially **Geometry**), **English**, **Science**, and **Social Studies**. Encourage your child to take an English class that includes a lot of writing--the more experience he has writing, the more easily he will adjust to college.

If he is not in an English-as-a-Second-Language program, you also will want to encourage your child to take a **foreign language**. Many colleges now require students to study another

language, although some colleges say children who are already bilingual don't have to.

Talk with your child to find out if he wants to learn another language (like French, German, Japanese) or if there are Spanish classes that he wants to take that are advanced enough not to bore him.

If your child changes schools between ninth and tenth grades, then you will want to visit his new counselor and have the same discussion that you did with his old counselor (see our discussion on visiting the school counselor in the last chapter).

What tests will my child need to take to get into college?

Most colleges require students to take one of two major **college admissions tests** when they apply to college. These are tests that students take across the country. They are supposed to help colleges compare your child's skills with the skills of other high school students.

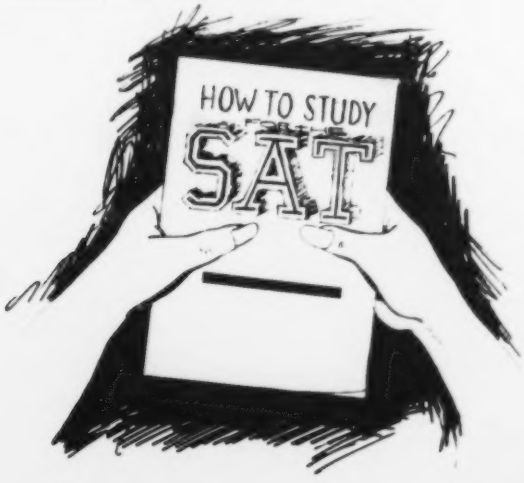
The two admissions tests are the Scholastic Aptitude Test (**SAT**) and the American College Testing Program Assessment (**ACT**). Some colleges require students to take both tests, some require one or the other.

What can my child do to prepare for these tests?

In tenth grade your child should sign up for a **test preparation course**. She can ask her counselor if the high school offers a course like this. Community agencies like ASPIRA also offer test preparation courses. These courses help students become

familiar with the types of questions that admissions tests ask, and help them review their reading, language, and math skills.

Schools and community agencies offer these courses free or very cheaply. Some big companies offer very expensive test preparation courses, but they are not necessary.



If no test preparation courses are offered in your community, your child can check the school or public library for a book on "How to Take the SAT or ACT." She can do a lot on her own if she takes it seriously.

The best way for your child to prepare for college admission tests is to continue taking college preparatory courses and do the best she can in them.

What else can we do to prepare for college?

You and your child can start attending **College Fairs** in your community.

At a College Fair people from different colleges and universities set up booths with information on their schools.

You can pick up materials on the different colleges and talk to the representatives. Be sure to ask them what specific programs they have for Hispanic students.

How do you find out where and when College Fairs are held? The high school counselor or community agencies can tell you when there will be College Fairs in your area. If there is an ASPIRA office in your state, they can help you learn about College Fairs.

Discussion Questions

Ask the members of the group:

1. What are some of the reasons children do not do well on tests?

2. What are the advantages to your child of practicing taking tests?

3. What are the benefits of attending college fairs?

4. What kinds of questions would you ask a college representative at a college fair?

Chapter Four: The Eleventh Grade

Marta Flórez has stopped by to visit her sister when her niece Carla enters the apartment, looking sad.

"What's wrong, Carla?"

"Oh tía, I want to go to college and I'm taking the right classes, but now my teacher tells me there are deadlines for tests, deadlines for applying to schools, deadlines for financial aid. I don't even know what college to go to! It just seems too complicated."

Marta takes her hand. "Sit down with me, Carla. You know your cousin Jorge just got accepted into college? I think I can help you get ready."

What courses should my child take in the eleventh grade?

In 11th grade, your child should take **Math (Algebra II)**, **English**, **Science**, **Social Studies**, and possibly a **foreign language**. The science class should include hands-on laboratory work, not just learning from a book.

If she has time, your child will be helped a lot in college if she can also learn how to type and use a computer.

Chapter Four

What about the college admissions tests?

Preliminary Tests

In **September** of 11th grade, your child should sign up for the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (**PSAT**), which she will take in **October**.

There are three important reasons to take the PSAT:

1. It gives her a good idea of what to expect when she takes the real admissions tests.

2. The results are used for three scholarship funds.

   When your child registers for the PSAT, tell her to make sure that she marks on the form that she wants her scores sent to any scholarship fund offered.

3. Colleges will learn she is a potential student and send her information.

   Make sure to tell your child to also check the box on the PSAT form to release her name to colleges. They will send her a lot of information, which will help her to choose the college that's right for her.

If your child does well on the PSAT, it will help her with scholarship options. However, don't worry if she does not do well. Her scores are not sent to colleges. Your child takes the PSAT because it helps her to do better on the regular college admissions tests.

Admissions Tests

We talked in the last chapter about the two major college admissions tests, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (**SAT**) and the American College Testing Program Assessment (**ACT**). Some private schools will require **Achievement Tests** (tests of a particular subject area given by the same company that makes the SAT) in addition to the SAT or ACT. The only way to know which tests to take is for your child to ask the colleges she is thinking about going to.

Schools in the East generally require the SAT.
Schools in the Midwest generally require the ACT.
Some schools will accept either one.

Test	Sign Up	Take Test
PSAT	in early fall	fall of 11th grade
SAT	in winter	• early spring of 11th grade • fall of 12th grade
ACT	in spring	late in 11th grade or early in 12th grade

• **NOTE:** If she doesn't like her results the first time, your child can take the tests again. She might do better on the second try, and colleges will usually accept the highest score.

It costs money to take these tests, but your child does not have to pay if your family cannot afford it. She can ask her counselor about a fee waiver to not pay.

What college should my child attend?

There are more than 2,000 colleges in this country for your child to choose from. How can she ever make the right choice?

The "right" choice for your child is the school where she fits in academically and socially. That could mean the local public college or the private university across the country.

It does not mean the school that was "right" for your neighbor, or your nephew, or even the school that you would pick. It all depends on what seems best for your child.

While each of the 2,000 colleges is different, they all have some characteristics that your child may or may not like. It's important for your child to think first about what characteristics she wants in a college. That way she can narrow down the number of choices she has.

One point we should clarify at the beginning. The difference between a "college" and a "university" is that a university also has programs for graduate students (students studying for their master's and doctoral degrees). For undergraduate students (those studying for their bachelor's degrees) both a four-year college and a university offer equal types of classes.

When your child is beginning 11th grade, it is time to sit down with her and help her think about the following seven questions:

1. What colleges offer what she wants to study?

To answer this question, your child would have to know what field she wants to study, and chances are good that she doesn't know that yet! She shouldn't worry--most college students change their minds about what to study even after they begin college. However, any ideas about what she likes or what she does well in can help her narrow down her choices of schools.

Chapter Four

To find out what programs a school offers, along with many other important facts about colleges around the country, your child will need to buy or borrow a **college handbook**.

She can ask her counselor to recommend a particular handbook, and then go to a library or bookstore. The school guidance office or community youth organizations like ASPIRA also should have college handbooks to look at.

College handbooks can tell your child if the college offers degrees in the fields she is interested in.

What your child wants to study should help you both decide whether she should go to a four-year college or a two-year community college.

What about community college?

More than half of all Hispanic students in college right now are attending a community college. Community colleges are two-year schools. Most of them are public, and they are less expensive than most four-year schools. Many community colleges are required by law to accept all high school graduates from their area who apply to them. Community colleges offer two-year programs like dental hygiene, secretarial skills, and police training. They also allow students who want a four-year bachelor's degree to take their first two years of classes at the community college, and then transfer to the four-year college.

A community college can be a very good decision for your child if she needs some additional help in basic skills or English, or if she wants to continue her education but is not ready to commit to four years of study. Community colleges may have more programs to help students who are immigrants or very poor, who have to work full time or are single parents.

However, your child should know that, for a lot of reasons, **only a very few students who begin studying at a community college later successfully transfer to a four-year school to finish their degree.** Your child will have to be very clear about her goals, and she will have to plan carefully, if she is to succeed in getting a four-year bachelor's degree.

At the community college, your child will have to:

- take as many of the classes required by the four-year university she wants to attend as she can at the community college.
- talk with the Admissions Office of the four-year college right away in order to know what classes the four-year university will count when she transfers after two years.
- talk with the Admissions Office or her counselor at the community college, so they also can help her choose classes and transfer when it is time. Some four-year universities work closely with specific community colleges to make transferring easier for the students. The Admissions officers will be able to tell your child if their school has any special links with other schools.
- apply to the four-year university in the fall of her second year at the community college. **If she waits longer she will miss the university's application deadlines.**

2. Does she want to go to a big school or a small one?

BIG SCHOOLS	SMALL SCHOOLS
More diversity	Can mean less diverse student population
More class choices	Closer relationship with professors Smaller-sized classes
More social activities	Fewer choices of classes/clubs/things to do
More bureaucracy	More personal support and attention
More competition	Smaller clubs mean more opportunities for leadership
More sense of being anonymous	More pressure to "fit in"

Generally, if your child enjoys "the personal touch" and has a close relationship with her teachers, she may like a smaller school. If she enjoys a lot of freedom and independence she may like a larger school.

The best way to find out if a school has the right atmosphere for your child is to visit the campus. Most colleges will give you a tour of the school if you call the Admissions Office. The high school guidance counselor or community agency staff also should know about group tours of colleges. If the schools your child is interested in are too far away to visit, spending time on

any of your local campuses will at least give your child an idea of whether she likes big, bustling schools or small, quiet ones.

3. Does she want to go to a public school or a private school?

Since public schools are funded partly by your state, their tuition is generally less than private schools. Public universities are almost always bigger than private universities--sometimes much bigger. In some areas the public university is the best school in the state, and in other areas it is the worst.

Before your child picks the state university, she should find out about it, and also think about the other questions here to make sure it is the best choice for her.

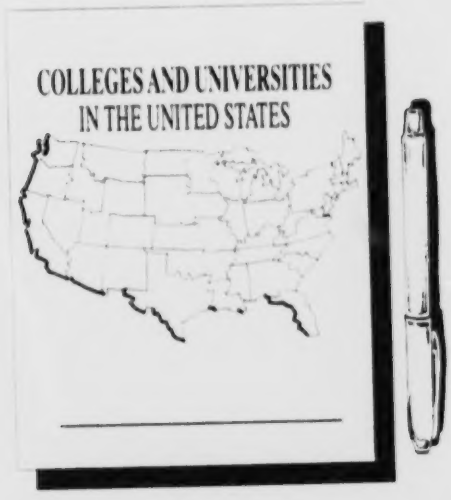
One reason many families choose their state university is because they think it is all they can afford. **Don't** let the costs of schools be the first thing you think about when you talk with your child about college!

When you first start talking with your child, pretend that all colleges cost the same. After your child has an idea of what kind of college is best for her, then you can start thinking about finances. We'll talk about financial aid and how to choose a school that gives you the best financial aid "package" in Book III of this series, *Paying for College*.

4. Where in the country does she want to go to college?

When families and students think about going to a far away college, they often think, "Expensive. Lonely." While both of these might be true, they don't have to be. Living on campus lets a young person become much more involved in activities at the school. It allows (or forces!) her to take responsibility for herself, and to grow up. Going away opens up new parts of the country and helps her meet new friends

On the other hand, homesickness is a common problem at first (although less so as she meets new friends). And you'll need to look carefully at the cost of room and board. Most important, though, is to keep in mind that the "right" school for your child might be the one 1,000 miles away. Don't rule out schools that are farther away until you've at least looked into them.



5. How "selective" should her college be?

By "selective" we mean, what are the average high school grades and admissions test scores of students at the schools your child is interested in?

> About 200 four-year colleges will accept any student with a high school diploma.
>
> Another 200 will accept only those students with very high test scores and an A average.
>
> The other 1,600 colleges fall somewhere between these two extremes.

In general, your child probably should not pick a school where her test scores and grades put her almost at the top or almost at the bottom of all the students who go to that college. Otherwise the college may be too hard or too easy for her. She should look at schools where her grades and test scores are about average for that school. Your child can find out how selective a school is by checking the information in the college handbook.

6. Does she want to go to an all-women's (or all-men's) school, or one with both men and women?

It's her (or his) choice. As with everything else, there are advantages and disadvantages to each choice. One interesting thing about all-women's colleges is that studies show that women take on more leadership roles at these schools than at mixed schools of men and women.

7. Does she want to go to a school with many other Hispanics, or a few? Does it matter?

Perhaps your child wants to meet people from backgrounds that are very different from hers. It is important today to respect and get along with a variety of people. However, going away to college can be a lonely experience, and she may appreciate being able to share things with people who come from the same background.

A school with many Hispanics and other minority students generally has clubs and support services for these students. The school may have a better understanding of issues that are important to Hispanic students, although this depends a lot on the people who work at each school.

Again, the best way for your child to decide if she would feel comfortable on a particular college campus is to visit the school.

While she is there, she should be sure to talk to other Hispanic students and ask them about their own experiences.

Once my child knows what kind of college she wants to go to, how does she get more information on the colleges that interest her?

By the spring of 11th grade, your child should be writing to the Admissions Offices of the colleges that interest her (the addresses are in the college handbook) and asking them to send her four things:

1) a college catalogue,
2) information on applying to the school,
3) financial aid information, and
4) information on particular majors (if she already knows what she is interested in).

A **college catalogue** is a thick book that lists:

- all the courses offered,
- all the professors,
- requirements to graduate,
- tuition and other costs,
- the campus and buildings,
- living arrangements,
- support services available, and
- academic and social clubs.

Encourage your child to write to a number of colleges, and not to decide too quickly on any particular one. She still has time.

As your child does her research, she probably will find that there are a few schools--maybe three or six, maybe twenty--that seem like they could be just right for her. These are the schools she should focus her attention on. After she looks over all the

information those colleges send her, your child should be able to narrow down her choices even further.

At this point you may want to remind your child about what she said she wanted in a college. Do the colleges she is choosing have most of the characteristics she wants?

How can my child get familiar with the schools she chooses?

In the spring of her junior year, your child should check with the Admissions Offices of the schools she is interested in--or other local schools--to see if they offer **on-campus summer programs for high school students.** These programs let high school students live on campus for a short time, going to college classes, living in dormitories, and getting a sense of what college will be like. There are also longer academic programs for high school students on college campuses in the summer months. If your child is interested, she can ask her guidance counselor for information.

A special note to non-citizens

If your child is undocumented--that is, she is not a U.S. citizen or permanent resident, and does not have some other type of visa--it can be hard for her to attend college.

First, many schools do not know what to do with students who apply without a Social Security number or a visa number. They think all students must be either citizens/residents or foreign students, and out of ignorance may tell your child she can't apply.

Second, depending on the state you live in, some public universities charge much higher tuition to undocumented students. This is because public universities have two tuition levels: one is a low level for students who live in the state (called **resident tuition**). The other is a higher level for students from other states (called **non-resident tuition**). Some states and public colleges have decided that undocumented students have to pay the higher non-resident tuition because they do not legally reside in the state.

Third, federal and state governments will not give undocumented students tax-supported financial aid. Tax-supported aid means all the government grant and loan programs, and college work-study. In addition, some colleges and private aid donors will also not give financial aid to undocumented students.

If your child is undocumented, the two of you will probably need to explain your situation to the Admissions and Financial Aid offices of the colleges she is interested in. Many colleges will admit your child once they understand her status, but be prepared that some may not. Some colleges may have some money set aside for financial aid for undocumented students, although, again, many will not. The public schools and community colleges that offer you the lower resident tuition may be cheap enough that your child can afford to attend them at least part-time without aid.

Finally, you should know that there is no federal law saying that undocumented students cannot go to college, or that they cannot receive resident tuition. (There is a federal law, though, saying undocumented students can't receive tax-supported financial aid.) If you think the schools in your state are being unfair, you may want to consider contacting other parents and a Hispanic legal services agency in your community and organizing to change policies and laws. Many future students may one day thank you for your efforts.

Thanks to a conversation with John Willshire Carrera, Esq., author of *Immigrant Students: Their Legal Right of Access to Public Schools.*

Discussion Questions

1. Ask the group to name colleges that they have heard about. Where are these colleges? Is each school a community college, a public college, or a private college?

2. What would the ideal college for your child be like? Why?

3. What would you say to your child if your child decided to go to a college you didn't like? What would you say if the college were far away from home?

Chapter Five: The Twelfth Grade

José Manuel is ready. He's going to college, and he knows it for sure. When his friends were thinking about the next basketball game, José Manuel's mother got him to start thinking about what kind of college he would attend. When he wanted to skip taking Physics, his uncle Ben convinced him it was important. When he had free time in the summer, his neighbor got him enrolled in a summer program at the local community college.

Now he's a senior. His test scores came back good. His applications to colleges--read over and corrected by his older sister--were sent in months ago. He did get one denial letter from a college, but his school counselor told him that was normal. It turns out that he had his choice of three schools, and he's sure he made the right decision.

Yes, José Manuel is ready.

What courses should my child take in the twelfth grade?

In twelfth grade your child should take **Math** (**Trigonometry** or **Calculus**), **English**, **Science** (another course that has laboratory work), **Social Studies**, and possibly that **foreign language**.

It is very important that your child talk with his counselor to make sure that the classes he chooses fulfill all the requirements the high school has for graduation.

You don't want him to finish the year and then find out he can't graduate without a semester of psychology or a swimming class!

What tests should my child take in twelfth grade?

If your child has not already taken the SAT or ACT college admissions tests, he should check with his counselor in September to sign up to take them in the fall of his senior year. He can also sign up to take them a second time if he took them in 11th grade and thinks he can do better.

How does my child get ready to apply to college?

The last part of college planning is for your child to apply to colleges and choose the one he wants to attend.

The most important part of this stage is keeping track of deadlines and organizing all the papers he will receive.

As a parent you probably are used to organizing things--filing your taxes by April 15, keeping track of your children's vaccinations, saving warranties, paying bills on time. Your child should use some organizing strategies so he can get through the process of applying to college. Encourage and help him.

Don't organize <u>for</u> him; <u>do</u> help him start organizing for himself.

Two organizing strategies your child can use:

1. Buy a wall calendar with large boxes. Have him write in the deadline dates for each application, test, or financial aid form. Little notes are all he needs, like:

   Oct. 28: Take SAT, 9:30 am
   Jan. 20: Application due, UCLA
   Mar. 15: Last day to turn in aid form

2. Buy some file folders that he can label and store in a cardboard box. Each folder's label can say the name of the school and the information saved, like:

   Fordham U. college catalogue
   Fordham U. application
   U. of Florida financial aid form

   The easiest way to find information later will be if the folders for each college are stored together.

By the fall of his senior year, your child should have his college choices narrowed down to less than five. Now it's time to fill out the applications.

The most important thing about applications is to turn them in on time! Schools will not consider your child if he misses their deadline for application.

The application form and the school's financial aid form will both have their deadlines printed on them--pay attention to what these deadlines are!

Each college has its own application form and its own deadline, so it is important to be organized and do everything on time. And of course, your child can always turn in his application before the deadline!

How many schools should my child apply to?

Certainly no more than five. Applications take a lot of work to complete, and each application usually requires that you pay an application fee. (If it's absolutely impossible for you to pay, then your child can request a fee waiver from the college Admissions Office or the guidance counselor at your high school.) However, your child should certainly apply to more than just one school, especially if that school is very expensive or very selective.

Perhaps the best advice for your child is to apply to <u>several</u> schools that he likes:

- a school that will almost certainly accept him and that you can afford without much financial aid,
- a school that probably will accept him and that you will need more financial aid to pay for, and
- a selective school that you will need much more financial aid for.

Remember, though, these are <u>all</u> schools that already seem like a good fit for your child. Don't be tempted to choose a school <u>only</u> because it "sounds impressive" or because you thinks it's all you can afford.

What do the applications forms ask of my child?

<u>Factual information</u>
First, they want **factual information**--your child's name, address, class rank at his high school, what clubs he participates in, what classes he's particularly interested in, etc.

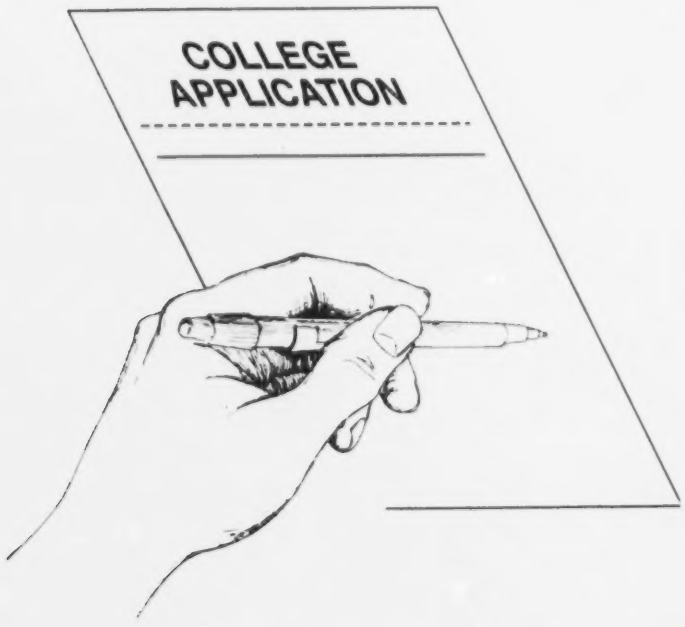
<u>Personal information</u>
Some schools also want **personal information**, like why your child wants to attend this college or what he considers his greatest accomplishments.

It is very important that the answers your child gives on the application look and sound good. In other words, your child should:

1. make a copy of the application and practice filling it out

2. type the answers onto the real application after he is sure that he knows what he wants to say, and that what he says is spelled and written correctly

3. make a copy of the final document, with a record of the day he mailed it



Transcripts and test scores

Besides the application form, all colleges will ask for a **high school transcript**. Colleges will also ask for **test scores** from the SAT or ACT admissions tests. Your child needs to make sure these documents are sent to the colleges he applies to.

Letters of recommendation

Some colleges will ask for **letters of recommendation**. These letters should not come from family members, but they should come from people who know your child well. Teachers, the guidance counselor, adults in your community who lead activities your child participates in--these people are all good candidates to write letters of recommendation.

Personal interviews

Finally, some schools may want to **interview** your child personally. This can be a very scary process for a young person, but interviews are a good thing. If your child thinks ahead of time about what his goals are and why he wants to go to college, an interview gives him a chance to explain his plans in person. Many more students who have personal interviews are accepted into college than those who don't have interviews.

Practicing the personal interview

So that your child is prepared, you can "practice" the interview with him, pretending that you (or some other family member) are the interviewer. You can invite him to sit down and ask him questions about himself, like:

- What was your favorite class in high school? Why?
- What activities did you participate in?
- Why do you want to go to college?
- What are your future plans?
- Why have you chosen this college in particular?

If you do practice with your child, try not to make him more nervous than he already is. This should be an informal and fun activity. At the end of it he should get you (or other family members and friends) to help him think about how to make his points more clearly and how to show his best qualities.

If you want to go with your child to the interview, that's fine, but make sure you let your child speak for himself. Even if he leaves things out that you think are important, he will seem more mature if his parent isn't trying to speak for him. Some schools will ask you to wait outside the actual interview room. In that case, you can ask any questions you have before or after the interview.

When will my child find out if he's been accepted to college?

Sometime in spring, your child should start hearing from the colleges he has applied to. They could send him a **letter of acceptance**, meaning he can go to that college as long as his final grades are as good as the rest of his schoolwork has been. Or they could send him a **letter of denial**, meaning he cannot go.

If your child gets a letter of denial, he shouldn't be too discouraged. Denials are common, and they occur for many reasons. A denial doesn't mean there is anything wrong with your child. In fact, because denials are so common, that is why he applied to four or five schools in the first place!

If the college sends a letter of acceptance, and if your child has turned in all the right financial aid information, then the college also will send an **award letter** telling your child what kind of financial aid package he could expect to receive from the college.

What if my child was accepted to several colleges?

Now is the time to make a decision.

Your child will decide which of the colleges that accepted him he will attend based on:

- the characteristics of the schools,
- the academic programs they offer, and
- the amount of financial aid they offer to pay for an education.

He should let this college know as soon as possible. He also should let all the other colleges that accepted him know by May 1 of his plans not to attend.

CONGRATULATIONS!

After all these years of preparation, it is now time to send your child off to his new life as a college student. There will be more preparations and worries in the fall, but for a short while, relax! You've helped your child through one of the most important decisions he can make. Allow yourself time to enjoy his high school graduation, to feel pride in his accomplishments. He's becoming an adult, and that's <u>your</u> accomplishment, too.

Discussion Questions

Ask the group:

1. What advice would you give to your child if he was not accepted into the college that was his first choice?

2. What advice would you give your child if he picked a college only because all of his friends were going there?

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What is ASPIRA?

The ASPIRA Association, Inc. is the only national nonprofit organization devoted solely to serving and advocating on behalf of Puerto Rican and other Latino youth. With major programmatic efforts in leadership development and education, ASPIRA also conducts research and informs policymakers on issues critical to Latinos. Its offices are located in six states, Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C. ASPIRA's central mission is advancing the development of the Latino community. To fulfill that mission, ASPIRA each year provides direct services to approximately 17,000 youth and their families.

ASPIRA Associate Offices are located in:
Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, and Connecticut (affiliate office)

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